DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 436 UD 028 177

AUTHOR Kwiat, Judy A.
TITLE Issues in Home/School Involvement Programs for Parents of Language Minority Students.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Inservice Teacher Education; Parent Education; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; *School Involvement; School Role; State Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Illinois; *Language Minorities

ABSTRACT

This document describes the first year of an intensive training project involving 24 individuals in teams of 3 from 8 Illinois school districts. The teams were used to train school personnel and parents in Illinois with the goal of developing parent involvement programs for parents of language minority students. Training teams participated in five whole-day Saturday workshops that focused on the following areas: (1) a review of the research on and the history of parent participation; (2) the roles and basic responsibilities of the family and the school in making the home a supportive learning environment; (3) the roles of the family and the school in improving collaboration and cooperation between the home and school; (4) the roles of the family and the school in improving communication between the home and the school; and (5) the responsibilities of the family and the school in defining roles in governance and advocacy. School districts planned to implement the following programs: (1) family literacy programs; (2) opportunities for parents and children to experiment with word processing; (3) informational and skill-building workshops for parents; (4) improvement of cross-cultural relations within the school; (5) tutoring programs that utilize bilingual parents; and (6) programs to increase parent understanding of school organization and to develop a network that will allow parents to access community resources. Baseline evaluation information was collected during the first training sessions and will be compared to similar information supplied by the school districts. Statistical data are presented in one table. A 79-item bibliography is appended. (FMW)

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ISSUES IN HOME/SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS

Judy A. Kwiat
College of Education
University of Illinois at Chicago
and
Illinois Resource Center
April, 1990

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Boston, MA

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of involving parents in the education of their children have been extensively reported. Parent involvment efforts have been correlated to gains in student achievement, to a decrease in student dropout rate/absenteeism and to a closer collaboration between home and school (Bennett, 1986; Epstein, 1985, 1986; Simich-Dudgeon, 1986, among others. In spite of this growing evidence, teacher education programs, both at the pre-service and the in-service level, have not devoted enough time or importance to the issues related to parent or family involvement in the educational process.

This study addresses the need for training teachers and parents in parental and community issues, particularly as they relate to the needs of language minority families.

Parent involvement is a concept which is interpreted differently by individuals from diverse cultural groups. In this country, parent involvement refers to home and school relations where parents involve themselves in academic and non-academic activities at home and school in support of their children's education. Epstein (1980) suggests that parent involvement activities can be clustered under five general categories: 1) supporting their children's learning at home; 2) maintaining communication with the school, i.e., attending parent-teacher conferences and other school functions; 3) serving as volunteers in the school; 4) becoming involved in governance and advocacy, i.e., belonging to the PTA/PTO, serving on advisory committees; and 5) assuming the role of tutor at home. Epstein suggests that all of these parent involvement roles have positive consequences, but the most effective role in terms of student achievement seems to be

the parent-as-tutor role.

From a multicultural perspective, it is clear that parent involvement may be differently interpreted by parents from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The categories reported by Epstein (1986) are culture specific to public school districts in the United States. Often parents of language minority students believe that "the schools have full responsibility and the qualifications for educating their children" and that it is "inappropriate to interfere with the work of the school on behalf of their children" (Simich-Dudgeon, 1987). For these parents, parent involvement means providing an appropriate home environment, food, and care. The task of educating their children, they feel, should be left to the professionals at the school site.

Consequently, for the majority of language minority parents, parent involvement as we in this culture understand it, is a new concept that must be learned. An additive model of parent acculturation is recommended and is the focus of this study. Within an additive model of parent acculturation, the parents' concept of parent involvement is affirmed and they become knowledgeable about the way schools function in the United States. The parents' concept of parent involvement is compared and contrasted with interpretations found in most U.S. school districts. Roles of the school, principal, teacher, parent and student are expanded from those with which the parent is already familiar. The goals of schooling are explained using culturally-appropriate activities that include the use of the parents' native language. This approach allows parents to make valuable contributions to their children's education and to the school community. It allows the parents to acquire new skills without feeling inadequate, and it enables them

to build confidence in their ability to assist their children, even though they may have little or no proficiency in English.

This paper describes the first year of an intensive training project involving twenty four individuals in teams of three from eight Illinois school districts. The goal of this project was to create training teams who would facilitate the training of educational personnel and parents in their individual school districts. This year-long process of training will be outlined and described in detail. Data from this study will be analyzed and interpreted.

BACKGROUND

The Illinois Resource Center (IRC), a statewide teacher training center funded through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), has long recognized that parental involvement on the part of language minority students is a resource that rarely gets developed to its full potential. In 1989, the IRC received a mini-grant from ISBE for the purpose of creating a pilot training of trainers program involving teams from eight Illinois school districts. Funding was allocated to program development and stipends for the local school district personnel who made up the training teams. Each team consisted of three members -- a parent, a teacher and an administrator. In the spring and summer of 1989, several planning meetings, involving a local task force as well as consultants from around the country, were organized for the purpose of putting together a theoretical framework for the training sessions to be held during the upcoming school year. Five whole-day Saturday workshops formed the foundation of the training module and were

scheduled in the months of September, October, December, 1989, January and February, 1990. A time period of six months was chosen in order to give the twenty-four participants from the eight districts ample opportunity to collaborate with each other and to develop, implement and revise plans for their individual districts. The eight districts are all geographically located in the Chicago area: Chicago Public Schools #299, Cicero Elementary #99, Evanston Elementary #65, Waukegan K-12 #60, Bensenville Elementary #2, Skokie Elementary #73 1/2, Elgin K-12 #U-46, and Palatine Elementary #15. The training teams were from eight individual schools from each of the eight districts. The teams were all racially integrated and represented the mix of language minority groups found in the eight districts (see Table 1). After completion of this training, each team will first implement plans for their own training program in their individual schools and will then serve as facilitators/trainers for other school building level teams in their district.

Table 1

	Parents	Teachers	Administrators
Anglo	1	4	4
Hispanic	2	2	2
Carribean	1	1	
Asian	1	1	2
Eastern European	1		

The content for the training sessions was based on an exhaustive survey of research in the field of parent involvement (see bibliography) which focused on mainstream English-speaking parents as well as language minority parents. A training team of three IRC consultants and one outside consultant analyzed and organized the content of numerous parent involvement programs as well as numerous scholarly journal articles and other publications. As a result of this analysis, the IRC team, along with outside consultants, was able to develop a theoretical framework upon which the content of each of the five monthly training sessions could be based. Attention was also given to input from the twenty-four participants as the training unfolded throughout the year. The following framework reflects the integration of both processes:

> Session I: This session explored the roles and basic responsibilities of both the family and school in making the home a supportive learning environment. A review of the research as well as a historical overview of parent involvement in U.S. public schools was also presented.
>
> Session II: This session addressed the roles and basic responsibilities of the family and the school in making the school a supportive learning environment.
>
> Session III: This session analyzed the roles of the family and the school in improving collaboration and cooperation between the home and school.
>
> Session IV: This session examined the roles of the family and the school in improving communication between the home and the school.
>
> Session V: This session explored the responsibilities of the family and the school in defining roles in governance and advocacy.

This theoretical framework represents a departure from what is done in most parent involvement programs. In nearly all of the program models examined, except for family literacy programs, the emphasis falls on exactly what the parent can do for the school. Most programs do not view parental involvement as a reciprocal relationship between the school and the home. That is to say, few school districts make any effort at providing extensive services for parents. Parent involvement is usually thought of as a one-way give-and-take relationship in which the parents give and the school takes. Epstein's (1989) five categories presented in the introduction underscores this traditional mindset regarding parent involvement. According to this traditional line of thinking parents are expected to 1) support children's learning at home, 2) maintain communication with the school, 3) serve as volunteers in the school, 4) become involved in governance and advocacy, and 5) assume the role of tutor at home.

A recent national study of eighth graders (Hasner et al. 1990), reports that fully 47% of the students come from homes with one or more family problems affecting their grades and test scores. This study lists six factors that place these children at risk of educational failure: single-parent family, annual family income of less than $15,000, home alone more than three hours a day, parents without a high school diploma, a brother or sister who is a school dropout, or limited English-language proficiency. This study documents that the United States has shifted from its mid-20th Century social makeup of a nation of families with two parents -- a father working and a mother tending the children at home -- to one of varied family patterns. The study points out that American society has moved into a period in which it contains many of what can be

called "new age" families, while schools continue to function as if they were serving children of traditional families. This is especially true of attitudes toward parental involvement. Many educators are now calling for a restructuring of thought regarding the role of the school in helping to make the home a more nurturing environment in which children are able to thrive.

It is a challenge then, for school districts to come up with plans for programs that will begin to meet the needs of children and their families. It is hoped that this training program will represent a significant step in that direction for school districts in Illinois.

CONTENT OF TRAINING SESSIONS

Session I: This session explored the roles and basic responsibilities of both the family and the school in making the home a supportive learning environment. It also provided an historical overview of parent involvement in the public schools as well as a review of relevant research (See Ada, 1986; Amundson, 1988; Chavkin & Williams, 1985; Clark, 1980; Crispeels, 1987; Cuban, 1989; Cummins, 1989; Epstein, 1983, 1986, 1989; Ferreiro & Teberoski, 1982; Gordon, 1978; Guillory, 1989; Harst, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1982, 1983; Heath & Thomas, 1984; Henderson et al. 1987; Lyons, 1982; Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Phillips, 1983; Quintero & Velarde, 1988; Simich-Dudgeon, 1987; and Wellish et al. 1976. Participants were also provided with information about traditional beliefs regarding local control for education, compulsory education, immigrants and mid-nineteenth century public schools, equal educational opportunities and diverse historical and cultural views

of education. Participants collaborated in an effort to 1) redefine the role of the school in making the home an appropriate learning environment, 2) outline the reasons why schools must make every effort to support the home environment, 3) identify the benefits of providing support for the home, and 4) outline the basic responsibilities of the family in terms of helping children to learn. In preparation for the second session, participants were asked to list activities and describe how language minority families have been involved in the education of their children over the last three years within each school.

Session II: This session addressed the roles and basic responsibilities of the family and the school in making the school a supportive learning environment (See Epstein, 1988; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Garcia, 1982; Green, 1983; Greenberg, 1987; Heath, 1982; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Saville-Troike, 1983) Participants analyzed a theoretical framework for school support (See Cummins, 1989), traditional approaches to parental involvement (See Amundson, 1988), conditions necessary for effective school support, factors to consider in involving parents and community groups in school support activities, and ways to involve community groups in the educational process (See Epstein, 1988, 1989). In preparation for the third session, participants were asked to identify and describe needs related to a home/school involvement program in their particular district. They were also asked to write a mission statement based on those identified needs. The mission statement was to include a philosophy that would be used to develop each district's program

Session III: This session analyzed the roles of the family and the school in improving collaboration and cooperation between the home and the school (See Berry-

Caban, 1983; Crispeels et al. 1988). Team members worked cooperatively to plan a needs assessment that would enable them to identify family involvement issues in their particular districts. Participants also reviewed numerous program models and analyzed those models in terms of how they had improved collaboration and cooperation between the home and the school (See Ada, 1986; Amundson, 1988; Quintero & Velarde, 1988). In preparation for the fourth session, participants were asked to identify and describe activities that could be used to improve communication in their districts.

Session IV: This session examined the roles of the family and the school in improving communication between the home and the school (See Crispeels et al. 1988; Marion, 1980, Nieto, 1985; and Phillips, 1983). Participants analyzed the ways in which cross-cultural communication often causes misunderstanding and conflict (See Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; and Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). District teams also analyzed a case study of a ficticious district and proposed a program model for a family involvement program that would meet the needs of that district. In preparation for the fifth and last session, participants were asked to design a fairly comprehensive yet tentative "master plan" for the development of a home/school involvement program in their school.

Session V: This session explored the responsibilities of the family and the school in defining various roles in terms of governance and advocacy (see Cummins, 1989; Nieto, 1985; and Reichmuth, 1988). Participants analyzed a theoretical framework for viewing various language minority groups within the greater context of a dominant society (See Cummins, 1989). Teams were also asked to define key terms such as advocate, educator and power and to outline how these concepts are realized within a home/school

program. At this last session each district's training team presented their vision of what a program of home/school involvement would look like. Teams collaborated to refine and revise program plans. Action plans and time lines were developed.

In summary, twenty-four individuals in teams of three from eight Illinois school districts attended five intensive, day-long training sessions which were spread throughout the 1989-1990 school year. These eight teams will, in turn, train teachers and parents within their respective eight districts. Each team consisted of one parent, one teacher and one administrator. Topic for the sessions included an overview of the research on parent involvement, basic responsibilities of the home, basic responsibilities of the school, issues regarding collaboration and cooperation between the home and school, issues in cross cultural communication, issues in home/school communication, issues regarding governance and advocacy for parents, and the development and implementation of programs for home/school involvement.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED PROGRAMS IN INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS

Two of the eight schools are planning to implement programs that are based on models of family literacy programs (see Ada, 1986 and Quintero & Velarde, 1988). These programs will focus on providing enriching experiences for both parents and children that are based on the enjoyment of reading literature. Parents and children will be involved in reading good literature as well as writing and publishing stories.

Another school will provide opportunities for parents and children to experiment with computers and to employ word processing skills for the purpose of putting together

newsletters and other documents in English and in several native languages.

Two other schools hope to offer parents informational and skill building workshops in selected areas such as how to help children at home in both English and the native language, and how to access community resources. Coupled with these activities will be training sessions for the building staff in the areas of cross-cultural communication, learning theory and second language acquisition.

A sixth school will be concentrating on improving cross-cultural relations within the school while they organize and develop tutoring programs which utilize the skills of bilingual parents.

Two other schools

will be implementing a program to increase parent understanding of the organization of the school system while building a network through which parents can access community resources.

DATA SOURCES AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

In an effort to evaluate this training program data will be collected over a three-year period. Baseline data were collected in September, 1989, prior to the first training session. This baseline data consisted of an attitudinal rating scale designed to detect subtle differences in attitude changes experienced by the members of the school district training teams, a checklist of current activities involving parents designed to describe the district's present level of involvement, participant questionnaires designed to describe the background of each team member, and district questionnaires designed to describe each

of the eight districts.

Information will also be collected at the end of this school year (1989-1990) using unobtrusive methods such as minutes of prior parent-teacher meetings, attendance of language minority parents at school functions, and other school records. Data for the first year will also be obtained through year-end interviews and observations of actual meetings.

Baseline data will be collected after the first year in each of the eight districts and will be compared to data collected after year two by correlating the mean scores on the attitudinal rating scales and by analyzing the questionnaires, observations and interviews.

Data collected for year two will be a continuation of the methods used for year one and will reveal the immediate effects. Data collected for year three will reveal sustained effects of the program.

Preliminary data were collected at the fifth and last session in February, 1990, by administering a post-attitudinal rating. An analysis of the pre-post-scores did not reveal significant changes in attitudes from September until February. Little change, however, was expected. The attitudinal rating scale was designed to measure two constructs: personal efficacy and attitudes toward culturally different individuals. All of the participants in this pilot training project were volunteers and were selected on the basis of their positive attitudes and present high levels of involvement with parent programs for language minority parents. Since all participants scored high on personal efficacy and showed positive attitudes toward culturally different individuals on the attitudinal rating scale which was administered in September, it was logical that there would be little

change. It is hoped, however, that this same scale will prove useful in subsequent training programs at the local district level.

In addition to the attitudinal rating scales, preliminary data were gathered informally from each team during session five. Teams worked in cooperative groups to brainstorm weaknesses and strengths of the training design. Teams suggested that each team be expanded to five members and that three parents be invited to participate instead of one. It was felt that parents needed the support of other parents. Participants indicated that they felt a perceived need for more planning time to be built into the training. It was suggested that the number of training sessions be expanded and that more time be devoted to problem solving and collaborative planning. Teams also expressed a need to have specific training on how to deal with problematic issues such as prejudice and negative attitudes. Another suggestion was to have parent, teachers and administrators work in three groups to solve problems that would be unique to them.

Positive comments focused on the high quality of the content and organization of the training. Participants were greatful for the collaborative, egalitarian environment, and they felt they had been adequately equipped to develop their own local programs. Team members were also complimentary about the timing, content and purpose of monthly assignments and viewed the assignments as an integral part of the process. Participants expressed that they had a feeling of accomplishment and felt that the knowledge gained far outweighed the loss of five Saturdays.

SUMMARY

It is expected that the training provided to these eight school districts will increase parent and family involvement in the schools. It is also anticipated that parents, teachers and administrators will have a more well-defined concept of the reciprocal relationship that is needed in home/school programs. It is expected that levels of participation, as measured by the data sources, will increase. Eventually it is hoped that increased family and school involvement will lead to increased student achievement.

At present this project is in its first year and immediate results (a comparison of year one data to year two data) are not possible. The training of trainers has been completed and eight school districts' teams have already started implementing preliminary plans for their particular schools. Those plans and programs will be fully realized in the 1990-1991 school year. It is hoped that the results of these programs will add to a small yet growing body of research that investigates the benefits of involving parents in the education of their children. It is also hoped that these studies will further understanding of the issues that pertain specifically to the parents of language minority students.

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August, 1989.